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Grammar and Linguistics in the Teaching of English

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CHICAGO

Currently there are two attitudes toward the teaching of grammar in the schools. Possibly for quite different reasons, the lay public and those teachers who do not have to deal with it in their classes are emphatic in their demands for renewed emphasis on grammar. Many whose business it is, or could be, to teach grammar as part of a secondary school or college freshman English program maintain that it has little or no effect upon the writing of their students. There is, moreover, a considerable body of experimental data (some of it highly dubious in nature) to support these claims.

The issue is confused even more by the fact that *grammar*, as the term is employed in this running debate, has two quite different meanings. In one of its senses it refers to a body of proscribed usages characteristic of non-standard English, combined with a complementary insistence upon the corresponding features of the

Our language is so close to each of us—and especially to us English teachers—that it is difficult for us to sit back and look at it objectively. One person who is able to do so is Dr. Albert H. Marckwardt, who presents here a calmly reasoned, dispassionate analysis of the classroom values of our old acquaintance, Grammar, and his ambitious younger brother, Structural Linguistics. Dr. Marckwardt is Professor of English at the University of Michigan and author of numerous articles and books on the English language.

standard language. The non-standard usage may be characteristic of a social or of a regional dialect (*e.g.*, *taken* as a preterit; *ain't*), or it may amount to nothing more than the intrusion of one of the features of standard spoken English into the written language (pre-verbal position of *only*).

In the second sense the term *grammar* suggests the attempt to describe the structure of language or of a language by means of a terminology and a series of concepts derived from the Romans and ultimately the Greeks, one which succeeded not too badly in describing a highly inflected language in terms of the philosophy and what passed for psychology prevalent at the time. From this we derive the terms we use to label the parts of speech, the elements of a sentence, and the various ways in which these elements may behave.

There is some right and some wrong on both sides of the dispute to which I have referred. It is probably true that the way in which grammar is and has been taught in thousands of American classrooms has had little or no effect upon the language of the pupils. There is an element of truth as well as irony in the story of the boy who, for corrective purposes having been made to write *I have gone* on the blackboard one hundred times, concluded his task by leaving a note for the teacher which read, "I have wrote *I have gone* one hundred times and I have went home." Nor can we place any substantial degree of reliance upon the likelihood of transfer from workbook exercise sheets to student themes. Yet this by no means excludes the possibility that a language analysis which did portray accurately and cogently the structure, operation, and potentialities of the language would not have the desired effect.

As a footnote we must also account for the fact that "in the good old days" when grammar was "really taught" it was or seemed to be an efficacious corrective discipline. There are several reasons for the truth, real or apparent, of this assertion. First, the student population particularly in the secondary schools and colleges was more homogeneous, reflecting generally an upper or upper middle class background, and speaking a better facsimile of standard English than is the rule today. These same students had more experiences with other languages, both ancient and modern, than do their current counterparts. This reinforced the presentation of grammar as such to begin with, and even more important, the very contact with another language threw into bold relief the structural features and potentialities of the native tongue. Finally, such wholly artificial exercises as diagramming the first sentence of *Paradise Lost*, a time-honored staple of the English classroom at

the turn of the century, whatever their defects may have been, did have the virtue of forcing close analytical attention to a highly stylized literary dialect quite different from the normal language habits of the student, one which was unusually rich in intricate developments of, and variations from, the norms of modification patterns and clausal structure.

Returning however to the dual concept of grammar presented earlier, (1) a series of recommendations prescribing a body of specific usages, and (2) an attempt at a structural description, let us ask ourselves in all candor why these well-intentioned approaches to a systematic treatment of language have failed, at least partially, in their purpose.

The first of these, English grammar in its prescriptive aspect, developed in eighteenth-century England through the work of such men as William Ward, Robert Lowth, and Dr. Johnson. As C. C. Fries, S. A. Leonard, and F. E. Bryant have shown, many of the specific recommendations made at that time and continued in American textbooks through the first three decades of the present century, had no basis even in the literary usage of the period. "Some of our most celebrated writers and such as have hitherto passed for our English classics have been guilty of great solecisms, inaccuracies, and even of grammatical improprieties, in many places of their most finished works," wrote Thomas Sheridan, father of the dramatist, in the preface to his dictionary of 1780.

We need not concern ourselves with the social and cultural circumstances which encouraged the acceptance of such an unrealistic attitude toward language, except to say that the very factors which made it seem desirable in eighteenth-century England were also present in nineteenth-century America. We are interested, however, in the net results. There were at least three. One was the adoption by many students of what may be called, for want of a better term, classroom dialect, a sapless and super-correct form of the language employed only within the hearing of the English teacher and in written work subject to her scrutiny, and for the most part, dropped like a hot-cake as soon as the hour was over. Somewhat more harmful in the long run was the fixation and perpetuation in the consciousness of many individual students of six or seven shibboleths which they carried about with them for the rest of their lives and not infrequently passed on to succeeding generations. Among these may be included the prejudice against a preposition at the end of a sentence, the avoidance of *real* as an intensive, *like* as a conjunction, *ain't* even in the first person negative interrogative, and above all the peculiar notion that "colloquial"

is in some manner a term of opprobrium. Aside from the essential negativism of this attitude, there is the further complicating factor that no two people seem to carry about with them the same collection of linguistic prejudices. Finally, the whole approach has resulted in giving many products of our educational system a feeling of inferiority about the language they use which amounts almost to a guilt complex, rendering them an easy prey to the quackery of the "better English" manuals.

To some degree the most violent excesses of the prescriptive grammarians have been brought under control through the efforts of a good many linguistic scholars. Textbooks no longer tell us that "*lesser* is a barbarous corruption of *less*, formed by the vulgar from the habit of terminating comparisons in *-er*," and some of the more advanced have even come to recognize the thousand-year-old propensity of *none* for a plural verb. The principal difficulty with the so-called *liberal* (I would prefer to term it *realistic*) attitude toward language usage is that perforce it must admit that in many instances English has no one or single established form. There are alternatives; the recognition and honest presentation of these will often result in a complexity which is likely to be pedagogically ineffective.

Nevertheless, as long as we continue to educate an ever-increasing proportion of our youth, we shall be dealing with students who come from homes where standard English is not habitually spoken. With them, part of our responsibility amounts to teaching them to substitute a particular prestige dialect of English for that which they normally employ, for Standard English is currently a social dialect and historically a regional one. Incidentally, the magnitude of this task is literally overwhelming, unequalled by anything in past educational and linguistic history. As long as we continue to attempt it, we shall have to employ prescriptive grammar to a degree. We must see to it that we use it in as enlightened a manner as possible. Among other things, we must recognize that language habits can be changed only through constant drill, and that the number of new habitual responses which can be firmly established within a given period is very small indeed. This demands careful selection and programming of what is to be taught.

Now let us consider briefly grammar as we, in the profession, usually think of it when we talk about teaching or knowing grammar. "In the usual approach to the grammatical analysis of sentences," says Charles C. Fries, "one must know the total meaning of the utterance before beginning the analysis. The process of analysis consists almost wholly of giving technical names to por-

tions of this total meaning. . . 'Knowing grammar' has thus meant primarily the ability to apply and react to a technical terminology consisting of approximately seventy items."¹

Unquestionably many teachers would be quite happy if their students were able to recognize and apply a grammatical terminology of considerably less than seventy items. There are some I know who would almost settle for the eight parts of speech. Unfortunately, however, as Robert Pooley has pointed out in his most recent book, "a great number of elementary school children are taught a large number of formal grammatical concepts . . . these same materials are begun again in the junior high school and carried a little farther . . . and still the same materials are begun again in the ninth grade of senior high school, and are repeated year after year through the twelfth grade. The results do not in any way justify the time and effort apparently put forth in this endless repetition."²

There are some, no doubt, who will maintain that the present-day school does not spend this much time and effort on grammar. The only answer that can be given to them is that Pooley bases his conclusion upon the best available evidence, including published courses of study, current textbooks, the estimates of experienced teachers, and the content of articles in the pedagogical journals.

This leads us next to ask why grammar teaching has not been more effective. The following explanation by Paul Roberts sounds somewhat polemic, but it has the virtue of being brief and to the point. "In one sense," he says, "the descriptions of language found in English grammars *are* true. They deal—in part, at least—with real phenomena existing in the language. . . Sometimes, to be sure, the grammarians describe categories which do not exist . . . But for the most part, English grammars discuss real things. They do not, however, discuss them truly. The reasoning on which the descriptions rest is a nightmare of confusion, contradiction, circular argument, jumbling of principles, and plain foolishness. . . . When we try to find logic in the proceedings, we are forced to conclude that English grammar doesn't have any. Intellectually it can only be described as a mess."³

This is a strong statement. Nevertheless, it is all too easy to

¹ *Structure of English*, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1952, p. 55.

² *Teaching English Grammar*. Appleton-Century-Crofts. New York, 1957. p. 55.

³ *Understanding Grammar*, Harper & Brothers. New York, 1958. p. 139.

document the charges of circularity, contradiction, and confusion. This is not to say that a wise and intelligent teacher cannot work with the system; many have done so. The difficulty is that the system has too many flaws to assure even a reasonable chance of success at the hands of the less wise and the less intelligent.

There are many reasons for the shortcomings in the system, but one in particular is worth pointing out, since it will help us to understand the possible role of present-day linguistics in this connection. It is well known that the apparatus of traditional English grammar goes back ultimately to the Greek analogist Dionysius Thrax, through the Latin works of Donatus and Priscian. As a language analyst, Dionysius performed reasonably well. The categories and concepts which he developed were well-adapted to a description of Greek, a language which depended heavily upon inflection as a device for signalling meaning. In other words, Dionysian grammar did for its time and its subject just about what a competent language description should do today. The machinery worked somewhat less successfully with Latin, but no major shortcomings were apparent.

The attempt to apply this particular analysis to English ran into severe difficulties. Here, after all, was a language with really a minimum of inflection, depending largely upon word order and function or structure words as signalling devices. Consequently the basic categories and concepts which had been worked out for the inflectional languages could no longer be identified or recognized in terms of form but had to be defined in terms of meaning, thus reversing the normal procedure of any descriptive science. Largely because of this do we find the circularity, contradiction, and confusion that Roberts complains about.

This brings us to the role of linguistics. Let us consider first the kind of description of English (call it grammar, if you will) that the linguistic scientist would like to develop, next the extent to which such a description has been achieved, and finally, how it may be put to effective use in the English curriculum.

To begin with, the linguist recognizes that English employs numerous contrastive patterns of arrangement, as well as certain other patterns of form, and that these patterns constitute parts of a structural whole. Our procedure, then, is to describe these patterns first, and only *after* they have been adequately described are we ready to ask just what meanings are signalled by these formally identified structures. Observe that this is precisely the reverse of the process that defines a noun as the name of something, or the subject of the sentence as the actor as an initial step.

Thus the question of "knowing" or "learning" such a grammar does not arise. It is obvious that each of us has "learned" this grammar by the age of four, since we have all been unconsciously reacting to and employing these signalling devices from that time on. School grammar would then consist of making the individual fully conscious of the operational structure of the language, in the faith that an awareness of its mechanisms, including both the potentialities and shortcomings of the machinery, would enable him to manipulate it that much more effectively. The linguist assumes, in addition, that a scientifically defensible description of the language is a better tool for the job than one which is full of contradiction and confusion.

So much for the underlying theory and approach of the linguist. We must now ask to what extent a workable and applicable description of the language has emerged. A candid reply to this question must recognize that the two principal approaches to the problem, one by Charles C. Fries, set forth in his *Structure of English*, and the other by Henry Lee Smith, Jr. and George L. Trager, available now only in the highly condensed *Outline of English Structure*,⁴ do differ on such matters as terminology, the extent to which phonological evidence is employed, the order of analysis, and certain other less fundamental matters. The differences between them are very fully described by James Sledd in a review in the journal *Language*.⁵ Still, we must not overlook the fact that compared with the traditional old-line grammatical analyses, the features that Fries and Smith-Trager have in common are far greater in number and more important than the ways in which they differ. Recently a more extended presentation of what is in essence a Smith-Trager type of analysis has made its appearance. A. A. Hill's *Introduction to Linguistic Structures* bears the significant sub-title, "From Sound to Sentence in English."⁶

A fair appraisal would recognize that these two analyses do provide us with a basic framework that can be employed in school texts, that to a degree both of them follow some false scents, and that in other minor matters all the details necessary to a completely satisfactory description of the language have not yet been worked out. Unfortunately the least has been done in what for

⁴ Studies in Linguistics: Occasional Papers, No. 3. Battenburg Press, Norman, Oklahoma. 1951.

⁵ Vol. 31, No. 2 (1955): 312-345.

⁶ Harcourt, Brace and Company. New York, 1958.

our purposes is the most critical area, namely syntax. Moreover, thus far the scientific description has been virtually limited to the single sentence. Utterance sequences larger than this still remain to be dealt with. Yet despite these shortcomings, there is enough to provide a foundation for able teachers and textbook writers—and also enough to mislead and mystify the less perspicacious.

During the past four years four textbooks have appeared, all prepared by authors who know something of linguistic science, who have tried to apply it in the books they have written, and who have recognized their indebtedness to it. They are:

W. Whitehall, *Structural Essentials of English*. Harcourt-Brace, 1954, 1956.

D. Lloyd and H. Warfel, *American English in Its Cultural Setting*. Knopf, 1956.

Paul Roberts, *Patterns of English*. Harcourt-Brace, 1956.

Paul Roberts, *Understanding English*. Harper and Brothers, 1958.

At least two others are in preparation. Only Roberts' *Patterns of English* is designed for the high-school student; the others are intended chiefly for college use.

These books do have in common certain features which distinguish them from other texts, features which may point the directions that grammars of the future may conceivably take. They all use the supra-segmental features of the spoken language (stress, intonation, and juncture) to help segment and identify language units. Not one of them begins with the parts of speech and other conventional definitions—in fact, not one of them even uses the term “part of speech.” Instead, they speak of “form classes” or “word classes,” and arrive at these only after some examination of how the language operates. They all recognize the distinction between lexical and structural meaning, and then focus their attention upon the major devices which English employs to signal structural meaning, including word order, structure words as markers, as well as inflection. From such an analysis, four major form classes (noun, verb, adjective, and adverb) usually emerge, defined in terms of form and behavior rather than meaning. In addition, certain groups of structure words are recognized, some of which are the left-over parts of speech; others reflect such concepts and functions as determination and intensification.

Though small, this is a beginning. Thus far there is no experimental evidence on how well it works. We have only the

testimony of enthusiasts and the doubts of the skeptics. If this is indeed the right track, the immediate tasks are three in number:

- 1) To improve the present descriptions of English, *i.e.*, to push forward on the scientific front.
- 2) To extend the application of linguistics through the preparation of more and better textbooks, reaching down into the junior high school and the elementary grades. Irrespective of the age at which abstractions can be grasped, children can observe language *behavior* as successfully as they can observe nature or any other phenomenon.
- 3) To train or retrain teachers to employ and apply this kind of language analysis. Professor Waldo E. Sweet of the University of Michigan wisely refused to release his linguistically oriented Latin materials to teachers who had not had some training in their use or in linguistics generally. We shall do well to proceed with similar caution.

These three steps will not be achieved overnight, and if we are to move toward them with deliberate speed, I would be inclined to place the major stress upon deliberation. I should prefer to see the movement as a progression rather than a revolution, emphasizing always the virtues of painstaking and rigorous observation of the language, an open-minded but nevertheless critical examination of the analyses which result, and a constant evaluation of the teaching devices which must be designed to make the presentation of the language structure functional and operative.

In Coming Issues

Material in future *Bulletins* promises to reach a new high in usefulness. Here are hints of some of the issues being planned:

What do students think about English classes—and teachers?

How is emotional maturity linked to reading habits?

What biographies are suitable for junior high reading?

What's new in theme evaluation?

What was Poe's philosophy of writing?

How should the English classroom be designed and equipped?

The Universal in the Classics

By CLARENCE W. HACH

In 1950 William Faulkner accepted the Nobel Award for literature by saying something that in reflection has even greater significance for us than it had then. He said, "Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up?"

As I work with young people today—eight years later—in the midst of despairingly thrilling news almost each day of man's capture of space—I sense the prevalence of this same tragedy—the forbearance of this universal physical fear, and I wonder whether, as Faulkner says, there are no longer problems of the spirit. Is there only the question, When will I be blown up?

Faulkner, of course, was being provocative in the way that I should like to be with you this morning as we share in discussing "Making Yesterday's Literature Live in Today's World" and think for a few minutes on "The Universal in the Classics."

In helping our pupils to forbear this physical fear of extinction or annihilation, we, with the aid of literature, must help our young people learn that the basest of all things is to be afraid, for, unless they learn that, and learn it so well that they forget it forever, little else that we do will matter.

In helping our pupils learn this lesson we must not focus their attention upon the annihilation of man. Rather we must center their attention on the "old verities and truths of the heart"—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. For unless pupils as readers center on the universal truths, they labor under a curse, as Faulkner says writers do who focus upon defeat. They exist, but they do not live. This missile-dominated and threatening world in which they exist needs emphasis of the spirit—of the heart—so that it will not seem

. . . a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Do you ever ask yourself why teachers still bother about the "classics" when many young people regard them as impossibly far away in space, time, realism? Here is one teacher's answer, presented at the Minneapolis NCTE convention. Mr. Hach is Chairman of the English Department, Evanston, Illinois, Township High School.

Our pupils have souls; they have spirits capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. Just as Faulkner says it is the writer's duty to write about these verities, and a writer's "privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past," so it is our job as teachers to bring together pupils with this literature, so that they can "endure and prevail."

The classics, concerned as they are with the timeless problems of man, have endured and have prevailed. They have surmounted many crises, and today serve as "a link of united feeling between people otherwise separate." They have proved that in the past man in time of crisis has endured and prevailed. They have stirred men's hearts, expanded his world, stimulated his imagination. Today, in the same way, they can help man endure and prevail through the crises of the present and the future by again stirring his heart, expanding his world, and stimulating his imagination.

Gilbert Murray, Britain's foremost classicist, writing in *The Atlantic* several years ago, made me think of the value of the classics when he commented on how greatly the good feeling of nations toward one another could be eased and bettered, if instead of current news scandals, we would read one another's classics—"if we'd habitually think of France in the light of Pascal, Molière, Voltaire, and Victor Hugo, and Germany in the light of Goethe and Kant and the great musicians; Italy in the light of Dante and Mazzini, and without forgetting St. Francis, instead of thinking always of the crimes of the recent past or the frets and controversies of the noisy present."

Through the classics we can emphasize the best of nations, and unite pupils with the past to show them that man—no matter of what era or nationality—has always been basically the same, has always sought for himself answers to the great questions that men even today seek—What is life? What is love? What should a man do? What is good? What is bad? Why am I here? Where am I going? How should I live? What is worth living for? What is worth fighting for? What is worth dying for? and the greatest, superseding all others, "Who am I?" To link today's pupils to the past, to tie the past to the present, to give the present direction, to make the future possible for today's pupils, we need in our English curricula some literature of the past that will be meaningful in today's world. Writers of the past can and do have something to say to young people today.

Clifton Fadiman commented on the value of the classics by

saying that they lift his imagination from the curse of the contemporary. "No matter how rude may be my understanding of them," he said, "they have enlarged my mental living space. As the shell lifted to the ear seems to carry in its curves the rumor of the seas of the whole world," he went on, "so [the classics] placed against the mind make audible to me the living voices of 3,000 years of civilization. He who has once heard these voices," he continued, "is forever freed from the thralldom of the current. He begins to see that all great minds are contemporary—not that they have receded into their common past, but that we have not yet advanced into their common future. They do not so much compel us to look back as to look up and, when once our eyes meet a ceiling, to glimpse the vast sky of possible ideas."

We want our young people to know of man's spirit in the past, not to think of the past as a bucket of ashes, as Sandburg once wrote. The social scientists do not think of the past in this way. They believe that current history—current problems—cannot be studied or understood in the vacuum of the present. We, as keepers of man's spirit, must also link man to his past, the past which made his present possible and which with him can assure his future. We must make possible an understanding that "an individual does not and cannot live simply as an individual, that he does not and cannot live in a society or in an ethical vacuum. He must learn to live and grow in a society with others as well as with himself in the solitude of his own spirit and the immensity of the universe." Thomas Pollack, a former president of this Council, once said that an individual develops fully as an individual only when he finds a way of life greater than himself.

Man has always been greater than himself and always will be. Our pupils today must learn this anew to "endure and prevail." It is through the classics, whether old or new, that they can find a way of life greater than themselves, that they can acquire the best values of our cultural pattern. But the old must be tempered with the new to make obvious the universality of man's aspirations and fears. Both can teach that when man is afraid—too afraid—he destroys himself and often others with him.

Let's take only one theme to see how reading several old classics with several current classics, if you will, can free our pupils "from the thralldom of the current and make them see that all great minds are contemporary."

Let's take the theme of self-dignity, something every man possesses—a sense of self-esteem and a desire to evaluate his position in society justly.

Today's youth must learn that man shapes the world into something that is himself. If he fails to make society part of his ideal, he dies a tragically forsaken figure who has failed in the prime mission of his existence. In a more or less modern book we find Babbitt with his inner nature in sharp conflict with the superficial and Procrustean society which surrounded him, lacking in the courage to risk his own social success and acceptance to change it. Babbitt's social consciousness was too arrested by a powerful dignity of self to counteract the oppression of social conformity. Every man finds some aspect of society in contrast to his divine dignity, as we may call that type of dignity which is greater than self-dignity. But only those alter society in whom this divine dignity is stronger than the dignity of self, in whom the will to change surmounts the will to conform.

Self-dignity alone could not save Babbitt. Unlike the martyrs of history who sacrificed life that the divine within them should endure, Babbitt had killed the supreme ideal that should have given meaning to his life and to his death. The more he bowed to the dictates of social conformity the further his helplessness carried him from his own ideals. He suffered the throes of discord of the two dignities, the chill of alienation from himself and, as Alan Paton wrote in *Cry, the Beloved Country*,

Deep down the fears of a man who lives in a
world not made for him, whose own world is slipping away,
being destroyed, beyond any recall.

Babbitt was the tragedy of a man who had no world left, even in his own soul.

In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, a recognized older classic, the perdition of Javert similarly arose from the welding of ideal into the purpose of survival by a strong self-dignity and desire to raise himself to a position of social esteem. But the cost of the sacrifice of divine dignity is always great for man to pay, and when the rays of the ineffable dignity of Jean Valjean cleansed his soul, the will to conform to certain ideals that had been his only purpose crumbled within him and left him a hollow grave of conscience. Like Babbitt, Javert had not shaped the world into something that was himself, but himself into something that was the world. Like Babbitt's, his tragedy lay in his struggle to attain the dignity which he had relinquished in that struggle. A dominant dignity of self often channels itself into a single foible we know as the character's "tragic flaw" because it alone in man precipitates his downfall.

In another recognized classic, *Oedipus Rex*, Creon's self-dignity

consisted in gross over-confidence in his own judgment which obliterated reverence for the commands of Zeus. His personal dignity had so successfully smothered idealistic dignity that he was oblivious to the divine law he shattered. Like Oedipus, Creon was unaware of the great source of his own diminutive will. "Am I to rule this land by other judgment than my own?" he asked. Creon was a tragedy because he too discarded the dignity of ideal for the piteous autonomy of self and thus was the instrument of his own destruction.

Like Creon and Javert, Macbeth, too, destroyed himself by murdering divine dignity—the awareness of the relativity of greatness, the reverence for eternity. Like his Greek and French antecedents, he could not face his deeds and himself at once. The pain was too deep, the split too soul-rending. Because Macbeth estranged himself from eternity, he saw no tint of nobility in the hues of human existence. Because he forfeited the only thing which gave life meaning, to him "all (was) but toys." For Macbeth, as for any man who sacrifices the ideal of his essence, the quintessence of life was drawn. Like Oedipus and Creon, he suffered a dramatic loss of self-perspective.

From the folly of Macbeth we learn that while dignity of self may be secure, dignity of ideal is all the while eating at the foundation of the illusory temple of happiness.

Oedipus' personal dignity, fed by success upon success, grew to such unwonted excess that it crowded the authority of the gods entirely from his concern. As his frame of reference became more imbued with self-confidence and devoid of humility before the divine law, his tragic flaw—pride—developed slowly into hubris. Oedipus Rex is not the tragedy of a man who adjusted himself to society at the cost of his inner reality, but of a man who forgot that there was something higher than himself.

In the same manner in which some men abandon dignity, others discover it. After the travail of long imprisonment, Jean Valjean's personality consisted of little more than a knotted confusion of primitive appetites. Valjean found himself in the midst of a world made strange by an absence of two decades. He concerned himself with rebuilding the ideals which had grown dim in twenty years of darkness. When the bishop articulated the night of primitive purpose with dignity of morality, a transformation took place of which Shaw speaks through a character in *Man and Superman*.

"All the other passions were in man before; but they were idle and aimless When they suddenly began to shine like newly lit flames it was no light of their own, but by the radiance of the

dawning moral passion. That passion dignified them, gave them conscience and meaning, found them a mob of appetites and organized them into an army of purposes and principles. My soul was born of that passion."

It is not often that a man attains divine dignity through others. Casy, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, found it by fitting together the jagged pieces of daily life into a pantheistic puzzle, the key to which, interestingly, was God. His dignity was humility and reverence for that which transcended his understanding. "All that's holy, all that's what I didn't understand!" he declared.

Driven by the insecurity of his personal dignity, Casy embarked upon the wilderness of thought to find his soul. Instead, he found that he was but a small part of one great soul and that his divine dignity was the shadow of God upon the human wall. The answer to Casy's quest was not dignity of self, but divine dignity.

Like Christ, Casy lived according to that dignity and died to keep it from breaking. Because his soul had been touched by greatness, it shed light on those around him. Because he shaped the world a little more according to the soul of man, he was a savior. For what is a savior, if not a man who shapes the world more truly according to what God he holds within his soul?

We find in fiction and history a few men who have claimed divine dignity for an entire lifetime. Antigone's dignity could not bend to dignity of self—not even to self-preservation. Her realm of thought was far removed from that of her peers. "One world approved thy wisdom; another, mine," she replied to Ismene's protests. The ideal was ever before Antigone, to be realized at any earthly cost. So insistent was she in imprinting upon the world something of her own idealistic nature that she never wavered from executing the will which ultimately led her to her death. With impetuosity and determination, she did not bow to reality, but made it a little better because of her existence.

Joan of Arc's thoughts, like those of Antigone, were not of our earthly realm. Her mind dwelt high above the fruitlessness of our tangled destinies, borne onward by the great dignity of ideal of which she was only the imperfect human vehicle. The small events of everyday life passed through her lofty ideals, leaving only the raw essence of eternity. Like all bearers of the divine, Joan could not conceive of material as an end in itself. "Minding your own business . . .," she exclaimed, ". . . I call that muck. I tell thee it is God's business we are here to do; not our own."

The divine ideal comes into conflict with many things, works many changes. When it confronts dogma, it is called heresy; when

it affects society, it is labeled barbarism; when it infringes upon tradition, it is insanity. Such dignity is often punished, oppressed, denigrated because so few people understand it. As Sophocles wrote in *Antigone*, "Nothing that is vast enters the life of mortals without a curse."

Cyrano, in another more recent classic, also dedicated his faith to an unwavering dignity of ideal. Like Joan's, Cyrano's soul was his sword, with which he pursued his enemies—Prejudice, Hypocrisy, Silliness, Expedience, Compromise. Cyrano's ideals were the bastions of his soul which he fought valiantly to defend from self-dignity upon the field of combat. He knew that he would in the end be vanquished, but gloried in ecstatic victory that he had ended his sojourn in life without sullyng his white plume, the symbol of his inviolable dignity. That token of his honor, that divine and majestic dignity, was the one thing he carried with him to heaven—the one object which outlasted his world.

Literature like that referred to focuses on the "old verities and truths of the heart"—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. A fusion of the new great with the old great creates a thread of occurrence which carries the glory of our past into the dynamics of our present. Literature like that referred to here helps man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have made us what we are. Great classical literature reveals man to himself—to others. It reveals others to him. It does so, as Marion Sheridan once said, in "a highly charged way, vividly, dramatically, memorably."

LOIS DILLEY

IATE members mourn the passing of Miss Lois Dilley of Rockford on August 7, 1958. She was a Past President of the IATE, for several years a member of its Executive Council, and its representative on the Illinois Curriculum Program.

Activities of IATE District Meetings

By EMMA MAE LEONHARD

Jacksonville High School, Vice-President of IATE

If the Illinois Association of Teachers of English has grown in significance and prominence—as remarks from individual teachers would lead us to hope and believe that it has—the credit for this growth must go to the district chairmen and to the membership, not to the officers, however conscientious and capable leadership we have enjoyed. Undoubtedly the English teachers' interest and participation in district meetings throughout the state has injected into both the state and national associations health-giving vitamins. At the same time we English teachers have directly helped one another.

Last year over 60 percent of the districts either sponsored or participated in district meetings. The Chicago District, chaired by Miss Addie Hochstrasser, met with Lake Shore at Northwestern University, April 26. Approximately 180 people attended the Conference to hear a panel on "English Programs for the Academically Talented" and an excellent paper on "Joyce and the Common Reader" by Dr. Hugh B. Staples. Mrs. Charlotte Whittaker, District Leader of Lake Shore, reports that they are already scheduling May, 1959, as a tentative date for their next meeting.

Mr. F. P. Armstrong, District Leader for Rock River, has reported a "quite successful" meeting held on May 3 at Dixon High School. The topic for discussion was "Literature: Problems and Prognosis." The teachers, in order that the Conference might "reach the heart of the practical" and "bring real purpose and merit to their considerations," were asked to take with them "names of books and authors undertaken" in their classes; and to be ready to discuss how they "attack vocabulary study in this area," what differences they make in materials for college-bound and terminal students, "good writing versus interesting reading," and what percentages of essay and drama they include. Representatives of several textbook houses contributed their insights and slants.

We learned from Miss Isabella Saunders, District Leader of Illinois Valley, that the teachers of that area met at the Lodge at Starved Rock Park on May 3. They combined an informal program of discussions on "Speech in the English Classes," "Remedial Reading," and "Developmental Reading," with even more informal luncheon discussions on topics chosen by the guests. Furthermore, Robert Burns, Naturalist of Starved Rock Park, presented

"Starved Rock's History, Flora and Fauna," illustrated with colored slides, and conducted a tour of the canyons. Starved Rock on May 3 must have been a perfect setting for teachers of English.

For the preceding two years Western Division has had a large attendance at its evening meetings held on Western's campus. Miss Adele Armstrong, chairman, has reported that this year on March 22 they held a Saturday morning meeting, the theme for which was "English for the Space Age." The program was designed, Miss Armstrong stated, to stimulate the teachers and at the same time to give them some real help with their problems in teaching the superior student. Dr. Charles Willard opened the Conference with a talk on "The Tame Stars Circle at Our Eaves." Then came a panel discussion on "English for the Superior" in the area of listening, of speaking, of writing, and of reading, followed by a buzz session on local standards.

We regret that space does not allow further detailed descriptions of district conferences; however, we shall give you a synoptic view of several more equally significant ones. Southeastern joined with Eastern for a formal conference held at Eastern Illinois University on April 12, planned by Dr. Eugene Waffle, District Chairman of Eastern. By the way, Miss Bessie Seed, chairman of Southeastern, has also announced almost a hundred percent county organization in her district. Congratulations, Miss Seed! Miss Florence Diers, in charge of the Peoria Division, reported a spring dinner meeting in the new building of Bradley University, at which correlation of the English program was discussed by competent leaders of all school levels in hopes of finding some understanding between grades, high school, and college. The members of Southern District, chaired by Miss Alice Grant, attended the Conference of the Southern Illinois Association of English Teachers, an autonomous affiliate of NCTE, held on April 26 at Carbondale. Their secretary-treasurer, Mr. G. C. Camp, graciously sent us a report of that conference, at which Dr. J. N. Hook was "consultant for an all-day conference on the teaching of composition." Sister Mary Rosaleen, R. S. M., leader of the Chicago Parochial District, has reported that 125 English teachers, their Secondary School Supervisor, the Dean of St. Xavier College, and several principals attended their meeting held on April 19. The first meeting of its kind was received enthusiastically, and suggestions were offered for a similar meeting the next year.

Likewise, we heard from Miss Lela Winegarner, Chairman of Central District, concerning the enthusiasm and good spirit which prevailed at their small informal meeting at Normal on April 19.

She writes: "Even so, I think it was successful, for at the conclusion of the meeting they agreed that it was more such meetings that they need, meetings where they do the talking instead of being talked at. Each teacher had taken an outline of what was taught at each level in his school, and several persons included material that others found very helpful. Several planned to send materials to others after they returned home." Miss Winegarner concluded with "And so I hope to plan more such informal get-togethers."

Whatever kind of conference, formal or informal; however large or small the group; whatever the topic or topics for discussion, the district meetings have had one thing in common—an enthusiastic spirit of giving and receiving, of making discussions practical. Executives and supervisors have been included in the meetings. Colleges have been generous in their cooperation. A common objective of the district meetings was also to encourage membership in and support of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. We feel that Mr. F. P. Armstrong's appeal in his letter to his district English teachers expresses that objective perfectly: "As district leader I shall represent you at the executive council meetings; however, your attendance during one or both days would be our district's best representation. Won't you support your own professional state organization by joining, or by attending this fall conference—or both?"

We wish you district chairmen and you English teachers continued enthusiasm and success in your promotional efforts and your professional progress. Do enjoy more of those directly valuable conferences. Miss Maurine Self has reported to us that South Central Division has already held a district conference at Illinois College on September 27. The year of district conferences for teachers of English has already begun. Good luck to all of you!

IATE Fall Conference

The annual conference of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English will be held in Urbana on October 31, November 1. The program committee, headed by Florence Cook of Shabbona, has arranged a program that promises to compare favorably with the best of the past. Reserve your hotel or motel room without delay!

The theme will be "I am a part of all that I have met." Here is a condensed version of the program:

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1958

- 9:00 A.M.—Meeting of Executive Council—Illini Union
- 12:30 P.M.—Registration, Main Lounge, Illini Union
- 1:30 P.M.—Annual Business Meeting
- 1:45 P.M.—We—Not You and I—Dr. J. N. Hook, Executive Secretary, NCTE
- 2:05 P.M.—English for the Gifted Child
- 2:30-3:30 P.M. and 3:30-4:30 P.M.—Concurrent sessions on
- A. English for the gifted child
 - 1. The Multiple Track Plan
 - 2. Enrichment
 - 3. Curriculum Projects
 - B. Aids for Teaching
 - 1. Mechanical Skills
 - 2. Literature
 - 3. Writing
- (Each person can attend two sessions.)
- 5:15-6:00 P.M.—Informal Hour—Illini Union
- 6:00 P.M.—Banquet
- Address—Dr. Richard Ellmann, Department of English, Northwestern

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 1958

- 8:00-8:40 A.M.—Our IATE President, Dr. Eugene Waffle
- 9:00-10:30 and 10:30-12:00 A.M.—Discussion groups on:
- 1. English for the Slow Learner
 - 2. Stimulating Interest in Worthwhile Books
 - 3. Problems of the Department Chairman
 - 4. Creative Writing
 - 5. Teaching the Novel in High School
 - 6. World Literature in the English Curriculum
 - 7. The Theory of Structural Linguistics
 - 8. How to Use Linguistics in High School
 - 9. English for the Gifted Child
 - 10. Aids for Teaching English
- (Each person can attend two groups.)
- 12:30 P.M.—Luncheon
- Address—"Poetry Makes Its Own Place," Dr. Paul Landis, English Department, University of Illinois

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